

## Editorials

### WHEN BUSINESS SHOULD MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS

**A**mericans are taking their deep-felt concerns about privacy into the workplace. In too many cases today courts have to rule if an employee's privacy has been invaded on the job. But juries shouldn't be deciding complicated personnel issues. Companies need to develop carefully thought-out standards of fairness on privacy-rights issues. Most important, they need fair complaint systems for nonunion employees to press claims of wrongful treatment.

Some say the U.S. needs a statute to prohibit unjust discharge, such as all other major industrial countries have. That proposal is probably premature because of the diversity of corporate cultures in the U.S. Let's give corporations time to voluntarily develop responsible methods of dealing with privacy rights. That way, companies in the vanguard will already have set examples. There are many issues managers need to confront:

- Random drug testing of employees, with no reasonable suspicion of impaired job performance, is an invasion of privacy. The exception: employees in jobs that affect public safety, such as pilots. But even a positive urine test shouldn't be reason enough to fire a worker, who should have recourse to counseling and rehabilitation.

- Privacy of AIDS victims must be protected on the job. It is not enough to say they are to be treated just like those who suffer from any other disease. AIDS is not like any other disease: It stigmatizes. Education programs should advise management and employees of its nature and the fact that it cannot be spread by casual contact in the workplace.

- In the age of computers, the financial, legal, and medical histories of job applicants and employees are more and more accessible. But these data bases often contain errors. A company has a legitimate need to know certain things about employees. But without discretion in probing background files, we will need legislation regulating access.

Additional privacy issues will continue to arise. Employers must develop an overall policy because our society holds privacy to be a fundamental right. Employees don't doff this right with their coats when they enter the workplace. Let this be a prime corporate commandment: You shall fire an employee only for performance-related reasons.

### HANDS OFF THE SOCIAL SECURITY SURPLUS

**A**ctuaries have forecast growing Social Security reserves time and time again, only to see Congress spend the money on higher benefits. Now a surplus beyond the dreams of the biggest spenders is on the horizon, and the funding of the national retirement system is becoming a hot political issue.

In 1983, Congress took the advice of a Presidential commission headed by Alan Greenspan, now chairman of the

Federal Reserve, and raised payroll taxes for Social Security while slowing benefit growth. A system that was on the brink of disaster will report a \$30 billion surplus in fiscal 1989. And the cumulative surpluses will mount rapidly, to \$1.3 trillion by 2000 and \$12.4 trillion by 2030.

The Greenspan commission felt that the surplus would offer two benefits. It would pre-fund some of the retirement costs of the Baby Boom generation. Just as important, it would lessen the government's need to borrow, freeing private funds for investment. The resulting productivity boost would build a stronger economy to support the elderly at a time when there'll be 54 retirees for every 100 workers.

Reaping that harvest, however, requires that Washington keep its hands off the surplus. That means no big boosts in old-age benefits. It also means that non-Social Security spending must be brought closer to balance with revenues, so that budget deficits won't offset the spur to investment from the trust fund's surplus. Congress has voted to put Social Security "off-budget" in 1993, but that's an accounting fiction that won't hide the trust fund's potential from greedy spenders.

Are Greenspan and Congress right that we need to increase national savings to pay for the Social Security bill down the road? We think they are. Washington must bring its spending under control for one more very good reason: to ensure that Social Security's surplus isn't frittered away.

### MAKE SCIENCE ADVICE A PRESIDENTIAL PRIORITY

**T**he long and fruitful partnership between science and government in Washington is in bad repair. U.S. military, economic, and political strength are so dependent on science and technology that the ties can't be ignored.

Many experts believe that the new Chief Executive should immediately name a strong, trusted science adviser to his personal staff, with a distinguished panel of outside scientists to advise him. That system served the nation well in the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. But attention started to wander from Lyndon Johnson's day, when Presidents began getting advice they didn't want to hear.

Having strong science advisers does not necessarily mean buying more science. Earlier advisers successfully opposed such Presidential favorites as the antiballistic missile system and the supersonic transport, for example.

While science can always use more money, the key is to spend it wisely. The problem today is that no one is making the hard choices between what can be done and what should be done. With better guidance, President Reagan might have been less intrigued by razzmatazz projects such as his Superconducting Super Collider and more interested in educating new scientists and engineers.

But the President cannot solve the problem alone. Scientists need to curb their own excessive appetites. And Congress should regain the discipline with which it once helped shape science policy. Above all, in an age of ever-more-costly science projects, everyone must accept the need for setting intelligent priorities.